



## Coqui Francolin

**Swempie**

*Francolinus coqui*

This small, sexually dimorphic francolin occurs in the northern and eastern woodland regions of southern Africa, from northeastern Namibia across northern and eastern Botswana to Zimbabwe, the Transvaal, Swaziland and northern KwaZulu-Natal. The Coqui Francolin is reputedly the most widespread African francolin, with a patchy distribution of several isolated populations in West, East, central and southern Africa (Urban *et al.* 1986).

Gillfillan (1908) suggested that the large coveys in undisturbed areas are a benchmark for the type of populations one should expect in good quality habitat, but this is probably not the case in this species. On the contrary, observations of Coqui Francolin in many different parts of Africa suggest that they are predominantly found as pairs or small family groups (Urban *et al.* 1986; J. Komen *in litt.*)

Crowe *et al.* (1992) grouped it with the Crested Francolin *F. sephaena* as genetically similar species, separated from the red-winged group (*F. levaillantoides*, *F. shelleyi* and *F. africanus*) as the next most closely related cluster.

Although a relatively secretive and easily overlooked francolin, the atlas coverage probably reflects the extent of the range in southern Africa.

**Habitat:** It generally inhabits savanna or well-grassed woodland, especially miombo woodland, up to 2200 m, and in drier country it may be found in sandy areas with good bush cover (Urban *et al.* 1986). The highest reporting rates were from Moist Woodland and Miombo. In miombo it is usually found in grassy clearings and along edges of woodland. Its preference for broadleaved woodland was identified by Tarboton (1980b) who found a

density of 14.7 birds/100 ha in *Burkea* savanna, and found the species to be absent from *Acacia* woodland at one central Transvaal site.

**Movements:** It is probably resident throughout its range (e.g. Tarboton *et al.* 1987b). The seasonal variation in reporting rates probably reflects seasonal differences in frequency of vocalization and increased group sizes after breeding, and hence conspicuousness.

**Breeding:** It has a long breeding season with a mid-summer egg laying peak in both the Transvaal and Zimbabwe (Brooke 1971f; Irwin 1981; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b; Hartley & Mundy 1992). Liversidge (1987) suggested that having chicks during the late rains or early dry season, when the grass is still long and unburnt, ensures a food resource for this seed-eating species. The atlas data peak during the late summer, probably owing to a bias towards records of chicks, rather than eggs.

**Interspecific relationships:** In southern Africa, it is largely sympatric with Shelley's *F. shelleyi*, Crested, and Swainson's *F. swainsonii* Francolins, and overlaps more marginally with the Natal Francolin *F. natalensis*.

**Historical distribution and conservation:** Although its distribution is allegedly limited by disease (Urban *et al.* 1986), the reasons for its population fragmentation are not clear. There is no evidence that its distribution in southern Africa has changed significantly in recent times, although it has been claimed that it now inhabits some grassland areas in the central Transvaal highveld where alien trees in open grassland provide suitable habitat (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b).

Meyer (1971a) suggested that potential threats to the habitat of the Coqui Francolin in Zimbabwe are veldfires, continuous grazing by livestock, and crop farming. Urban *et al.* (1986) also referred to its sensitivity to changes in grass cover as a result of burning and overgrazing. Its reporting rate in Botswana is about six times higher in protected areas than on unprotected land which is usually under heavy grazing pressure (M. Herremans pers. comm.). Clearing of trees in dense woodland, on the other hand, may benefit it (A.J. Tree pers. comm.).

R.M. Little

Recorded in 739 grid cells, 16.3%

Total number of records: 6345

Mean reporting rate for range: 13.3%

### Reporting rates for vegetation types



